

SOUVENIRS IN THE KINGDOM OF SHADOWS

by Héctor Antón

Lorena Gutiérrez Camejo (Havana, 1987) grew in a family which ignored the cyclic antagonisms between material comforts and political hegemony. Much less did she suffer the havoc of the “Special Period in Times of Peace.” Being born in this island, however, is not an unmentionable feast for anyone, as the Great Sublimator of that polemic and stereotyped notion of *what is Cuban* intended to make us believe, but a temptation to submerge us (later or sooner) in the labyrinth of the dark splendor. Perhaps because of that, power relations lean out in her path without committed ostentations. Of course, without obviating the gestural lightness and ruling out its false heaviness. So she chooses a beautiful day just to shout, rehearses displacing with a walker interpreting the abandonment of the domestic cloister or designs an environment covered with holographic vinyl where the subject addicted to the soft layers ends up neutralized by his powerlessness. If there are political artists who forsake this condition drowned in a sea of prejudices, Lorena very fairly adopts her *fashion* vocation. This allows her to recreate the nude appearance of confuse essences: she locates activated traps as the mined field of a museum (*Soliloquio del zorro* - Soliloquy of the Fox, 2013) or explores the links between Scandinavian monarchies and dysfunctional peripheral scepters (*Consensv popvli regnvm svbsistit*, 2014). As an attractive and proud only child, Gutiérrez Camejo began to think she deserved everything, but life demonstrated her that she had to struggle very hard to win or deserve something. One day she visited for the first time a physical prison and there she discovered sophisms which surpassed words and habitual things. Since then, those Foucaultian readings made when studying in the High Institute of Arts felt like bookish pursuits of children unaware of the hell of survival.

En la cárcel de tu piel - In the jail of your skin (FIRST SESSION)

Lorena Gutiérrez made good use of the contextual vein offered by the exhibition in the Military Historical Park Morro Cabaña during the Eleventh Havana Biennial (2012). *Condenado* (Condemned) transformed the G-2 booth into a radiant, interactive and fragile wrapping where visitors had to take off their shoes to enter. In a somber vault lined with holographic vinyl, only a neon cage hung from the roof. For those who gave themselves to the void of charm, the rest was silence. Only abstaining or wandering in the limbo of insinuated triviality as a voluntary isolation to kill time remained. Although the apparent banality of the piece embraces a repertoire of invisible bars paralyzing men as social actors trapped in whims postulated as genuine convictions: useless resentment, projected rebelliousness as poor imitation of productive orphanage, sterile stardom or the obligation to learn how to be a demagogue. *Condenado* defends the sigh of a sparkling stance, a tyrant of prejudices where what is false and what is heavy are old enemies merging in a tight embrace. Such a high quota of formal gleam generated a paradoxical hue: at times without intending to suggest something compromising, we end up exteriorizing everything surrounding us and mortifying without deceit. It is not fortuitous either that a fire would not leave behind traces of the wrapping. Perhaps a sudden “electric breakdown” granted the “fictitious convict” the privilege of being incinerated as last media desire. Perhaps the fury of envy had been the culprit of its price in ashes. Such an experience would serve to articulate an operation in which accident, disappearance, stench and intimate memory (or collective amnesia) might inject the soft masking a cynical seasoning in its existential matrix.

Justice in the Boudoir (SECOND SESSION) Turning a criminal vice into a virtually profitable product generated the idea of transforming the Galería Servando Cabrera Moreno into a boutique or, rather, into its parody. This small place located in the Havana neighborhood of Miramar is part of what used to be a department store in the fifties. Therefore, the former Ten Cent store in *La Copa* served as the stage for Lorena Gutiérrez to materialize one of the collateral exhibitions during the Twelfth Havana Biennial (May-June, 2015).

According to authorized historiography, Norval Morris was the first sociologist focusing his studies on connecting social position, intelligence and technique to commit an offense. He labeled this group as “criminals of the upper world.” Meanwhile, Thorstein Veblen developed “The Theory of the Leisure Class” by linking the capitalist prototype of the wealthy man with the model delinquent of the immediate future.

In this review of the juridical clichés of the lower class, impelled by the Chicago Sociological School, the concept of “White-Collar Crime” emerged. It was coined by the influential criminologist Edwin H. Sutherland, who announced his *White Collar Crime* monograph in 1949. That same year George Orwell published his early testimony *1984*. Yes: another bibliographic coincidence without explicit links at first sight. *Upperworld* (2015), Lorena’s exhibition, shaped an environment as site specific, where she put on the same level the structure of “unnamed positions” of an advertising campaign launched within four walls of minimal premises. Thus, what was really dark became enjoyable for those who accepted to wear a white collar and pose in front of a camera. In a relaxed evening, the perverse emblem reverted into a new fashionable accessory, attainable for spectators at the opening who were interactive and lack of prejudices.

All in the name of a performance-fashion in which enjoying a double moral season is a mere sanitary matter. “It is, don’t forget it, a city in which everyone wants to be deceived,” the Pedagogue of Virgilio Piñera’s *Electra Garrigó* would reply as a witness hidden in the iceberg of the show. “Everything is well because everything is wrong,” philosopher Theodor W. Adorno would add, remembering ill-fated Walter Benjamin. The Great Absurd of a disguised justice with the pleasure of the artistic show was represented by some manikins as trophies of that “black figure” due to the vice of using pink jackets in terms of high range frauds or embezzlements. One of these manikins stopped in the space could be the “invisible leviathan,” who remained safely and happily unknown before the impossibility of someone pointing him with the finger. (White-collar crime: Expression regarding violations which usually take place without staining the hands; without previous intimidation, use of force or firearms.) Satin vandalism or passwords inscribed in a hem. Wild boar tusks. Louis Vuitton. Democracy. Jean-Baptiste Grenouille. Bribery. *Vogue*. Law of Penal Proceedings. *Saint Juliet’s Martyrdom*. Manto Negro. Areas of Offensive Opacity. Why do whales commit suicide in mass or why a human link routinely signing a crucial paper does not perceive the light at the end of the tunnel? Nothing is as comforting for a megalomaniac as forging the illusion of being untouchable. Sustaining a cool passion with its dose of ambivalent glamour to sketch an advertising Matrioska was Lorena’s intention when combining art, justice and power. *Upperworld* became a “built situation” with light panoptism, an action destined to aestheticize disciplinary pleats gilded by the pill of a vulgar marginality, inept to support the weight of the blame.

(Quasi) FINAL verdict

It is not casual that the leading neon cage in *Condenado* mutated into the promotional logo of *Upperworld*. From one biennial to another biennial. From an environment to another environment. From a skin inhabited to another renouncing. The tautological will of the historical residue is the prima donna (always unique and never the best) of this discursive runway. Lorena Gutiérrez’s work in progress is barely beginning. Let us give time the final say in a path exposed to the sinuous eventualities of art and life. □